



Testimony of Brad Williams, Director, Government Relations House Judiciary Committee

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Brad Williams, with the Detroit Regional Chamber. Historically, business organizations have been more involved in advocating on behalf of our members in regard to tax policy than the details of how that tax money is spent. We drew the conclusion that more and more, policies adopted by the Legislature were having an adverse impact on state appropriations which in turn was driving bad tax policy such as the Michigan Business Tax surcharge.

As a consequence, the Chamber decided to take a comprehensive look at reform of the Corrections system, which accounts for over 20% of general fund spending and 1 in 3 state employees. In 2008, the Chamber Board voted to support seven specific policies that will dramatically change the way the Department of Corrections does business, save hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars and protect public safety. For your information, I have supplied the committee with copies of those recommendations.

Included in the seven point plan for cost saving reforms in the corrections system was a recommendation to thoughtfully re-instate a system of disciplinary credits for those under the supervision of the Michigan Department of Corrections. I believe the bills before you today go a long way towards accomplishing this goal. Further, I believe that these bills will not compromise public safety and will bring Michigan's "Truth in Sentencing" policies in line with most of our neighboring states.

I understand that the number one priority for members of this committee as they address corrections reform is to keep people safe. We agree. That is why before bringing these suggested policies to our board, I wanted to make sure that reducing the length of stay for inmates would not have a dramatic negative impact on public safety. In my research, study after study showed that length of stay has very little to do with the likelihood that a prisoner is going to re-offend. We believe that with continued support for current and prospective MPRI programs this bill will not negatively impact public safety.

The Chamber has been supporting comprehensive cost-saving structural reform across the budget as an alternative to a huge tax increase on businesses and

individuals. There is no question that significant reform to the Michigan Department of Corrections must be part of an overall reform agenda. Also, while we believe that the Department can and should take steps to lower their per prisoner cost, significant savings in the Department of Corrections require lowering the prison population. There are a number of ways to accomplish this goal, including steps the administration has already taken. We believe the bills before you continue that progress and ask for your support.



Corrections Reform Recommendations

"The Detroit Regional Chamber supports structural reforms to Michigan's budget that will result in both short and long term savings. Specifically, reforms focused on our Corrections system should address all cost drivers, including overhead, personnel, length of sentence and recidivism. All identified savings in Michigan's budget must be connected to corresponding reductions in the Michigan Business Tax surcharge."

Spending on Corrections has increase 538% in the last 34 years in Michigan. Corrections spending now represents 20% of the general fund budget, up from 5% in 1983. Michigan is one of four states that spends more on prisons that higher education. A meaningful reduction in the Michigan Business Tax Surcharge is dependent upon significant reductions in state spending in this department.

Right-size the Prison Population

1. Reform and De-politicize Parole

- The parole board should return to its pre-1992 status as a board of professional civil servants, since becoming a politically appointed body parole rates for low-risk offenders has plummeted.
- Parole guidelines should reflect the priority of moving low-risk offenders back into the community and recognize the proper role of the parole board and the sentencing judge.
- Increasing parole for low-risk offenders to 1992 levels and the threshold of low-risk offenders to 1996 levels saves \$120 million.

2. Give inmates credits for performing tasks that will reduce recidivism

- Michigan is one of the few states that does not incentivize inmates for positive actions with a reduction in minimum sentences.
- Most other states by incentivize inmates by reducing their inmates minimum sentence by up to 15% with disciplinary credits
- If Michigan can reduce 3,000 inmates' sentences by 15% the savings would be \$100 million.

3. Re-create a Sentencing Commission with increased taxpayer representation

- Michigan should re-establish a Sentencing Commission to bring our average length of stay in line with our neighboring states (it is currently 14 months longer).
- Reducing average length of stay by 14 months results in \$400 million in long term annual savings.

4. Support policies that keep paroled prisoners out of prison

- The Michigan Prisoner Re-entry Initiative should be fully implemented to decrease recidivism by 10% and save \$40 million.
- Parolees who violate parole for a technical violation should be limited to a one year return to prison before being re-paroled to save \$14 million.

Maximize Our Current Investment

5. Allow the private sector to compete to deliver food service

- Both Kansas and Florida have privatized food service in their prison system.
- Based on their cost savings, Michigan could save \$39 million by doing the same.

6. Partner with public and private institutions to deliver non-security related services

- Prisons need many services that don't require a corrections officer including transportation, health care, pharmaceuticals and laundry.
- MDOC should maximize the use of inmates to deliver these services and partner with both the public and private sector to deliver them.

7. Reduce administrative costs within the DOC by 10%

- The Department should make every effort to ensure that the money is going to the prisons and not staying in Lansing.
- A reduction of each line-item that doesn't go into a prison would save \$82.6 million.